

## "TV RIGHTS" - FAIR OR FALSE?

A few weeks ago I turned on network television one weekend to see a Bell South CEO announce the award of more than one million dollars to winners of a golf championship. Bell South TV commercials followed, sometimes back-to-back, extolling its multiple services. For a consumer who has seen no rollback in cost of telephone service since the break up of AT&T it was clear that false advertising was intended to enrich a few athletes, paid highly for their TV performances, by the price-gouging of consumers. It was typical of what happens when the "TV Rights" of sports franchises -garnered from the "public airwaves" -are allowed to overrun consumer rights to fair competition and lower-cost products under Anti-Trust laws.

When the public "owns" the airwaves, it deserves public control over TV sales of time, product, or goods. It has a right to freedom from deceptive or expensive TV commercials paid for by "passing back" the cost to consumers of goods in stores, a right to public bidding for "TV Rights" by organizations, sports franchises, or producers, a right to set fees, fines, and leasing costs for those "TV Rights", and a right to equal access to TV for purposes guaranteed under the First Amendment. But Bell South, a sports franchise, and a TV network had negotiated an agreement for sale of "TV Rights" only for the purpose of fraudulent and false advertising for their own commercial gain.

It's time to balance the TV Rights of special interest groups with those of the public. TV commercials ought to be cost-effective, made by non-ad agency producers, and restricted to two minute time slots at the beginning and end of programs. "Free TV" is not free to the consumer who must buy price-hiked drugs to support multi-million dollar conglomerates in Manhattan and receives no return on his investment except deception and fraud. "Free TV" is not free to the consumer who pays taxes on goods and wages while TV producers aren't charged fees or 85% taxes for their multi-million dollar deals from the public airwaves. "Free TV" is not free to those asked to support public television's non-commercial advertising by direct fundraising because TV commercials are offensive. "Free TV" is not free to those asked to pay cable rates for Rerun TV on a hundred plus channels by subscription when Commercial TV is not forced to compete fairly in a marketplace under public interest rules.

The TV Rights of the public are not served when commercial television seeks legal, political, or economic favoritism from government officials to retain practices, monopolies, or charges which make them non-competitive in the marketplace. It's time the FCC freed TV from its historical overreach, lowest common denominator audience debasement, and false advertising methods and gave TV Rights back to the public.